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ABSTRACT

The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) has had a long interest in physical education. At the convention at which the PTA was founded, a major address was presented on the subject of "physical culture." After 80 years, the PTA is still concerned with the physical as well as mental education of children. A major concern is with the psychological damage that high pressure, competitive sports programs may have. In conjunction with its efforts on behalf of physical education, the PTA in recent years has become deeply concerned with piecemeal efforts in the area of health education. Consequently they are now actively promoting a program of comprehensive school health education through passage of the Comprehensive School Health Education Bill. This bill would establish a three-year program to encourage the development of sound health habits in children and authorize grants for teacher training. Helping to secure passage of this bill is one of four priorities in the National PTA's current legislative program. (DT)

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HOW THE PTA VIEWS PHYSICAL EDUCATION

I am pleased to be with you today; to have been invited to participate in this panel discussion; and to have this opportunity to present the PTA's point of view on physical education.

It may surprise you to learn that at the first convention of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897--the convention at which the national parent-teacher organization was founded--a speaker devoted a major address to the subject of "physical culture." The title of the speech was "The Relation of Proper Physical Culture to the Health and Morals of the Home."

Evidently, the importance of physical education had just begun to be recognized at that time--just before the turn of the century--for the speaker said that "there is now in progress a great reformation in respect to the study of physical culture. The idea that the body is to be educated is sweeping over the country like a tidal wave."

The speaker also emphasized the important role that physical education can play in building character. The

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conclusion was that "a proper system of physical culture calls for intellectual, moral, and spiritual development, for it does not recognize the body as a separate entity, but as the expressive agent of being."

In many ways, these ideas, expressed almost eighty years ago, reflect today the PTA's position on the importance of physical education. Today, the PTA is concerned--as it always has been--with the whole child, and with all children. And we are as concerned with the physical well-being of children as we are with their intellectual and emotional development.

Let me give you an example. One of the five PTA Objects is "to develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social, and spiritual education."

The PTA, as this Object makes clear, sees physical education as one important aspect of the child's education--important in itself, yes, but also important because of the way it affects or informs the child's mental, social, and spiritual growth.

In 1898, delegates to the second national PTA convention also addressed themselves to the subject of physical education. They resolved, in fact, that the

organization would "use its influence towards effecting the general adoption of physical education work in our public schools." But while the delegates heartily approved of the proper use of athletics, the resolution paused to caution that "we, as mothers, urge upon educators the abolition of excesses and abuses which cause such training to defeat its own end."

I don't know what excesses and abuses the mothers of 1898 might have had in mind, but their concern at that time was no less than PTA concern today about high-pressure, competitive sports programs. I speak of those organized games that are more adult-centered than child-centered--programs staffed by coaches motivated by a will to win so strong that children, in the process of playing, are sometimes exploited or psychologically damaged.

This isn't the PTA's only gripe about the form that efforts designed to stimulate physical education sometimes take.

During World War I, for example, Americans found it difficult to believe that one-third or more of the boys being drafted were physically unfit. This didn't disturb, however, those advocates of the Universal Compulsory Military Service, who, in turn, used this fact to argue that physical education could best be

provided through military training and service.

The PTA, at the time, disagreed, pointing out that such action gave no recognition to "the necessary physical development of girls." (And remember, now, this was during World War I, long before Gloria Steinem was born.) As a result, the PTA decided instead to work for the passage of a bill favoring universal physical education.

Later, at the 1920 PTA convention, delegates adopted a resolution urging "the passage of the Bill for Universal Physical Education as a part of the school system, thereby giving equal opportunity to girls and boys for physical development and making unnecessary the effort for compulsory military training."

This PTA effort, in 1920, underscores our constant concern that all children--and not one favored group--be the recipients of the benefits of physical education.

Two years later, the effort multiplied when delegates to the 1922 convention adopted a resolution favoring "well-rounded, health-promotion programs in schools." The same convention supported a bill that would provide for federal aid and would stimulate states to enact appropriate laws governing physical education. This resolution, however, put the emphasis on a well-rounded health program, and not solely on physical education.

In 1923, the PTA stepped forward again. It formed a physical education committee whose efforts, several years later, culminated in the production of PTA's first pamphlet on physical education.

This pamphlet was useful in a number of ways. It included, for example, a scorecard for PTA members to use in estimating the depth, breadth, and efficiency of the physical education programs in their schools. It also featured an introduction devoted to the psychological, medical, and character-building goals of physical education, the purpose of which it summarized in these simple but important words: straight--strong--spry--smiling--square.

In 1929, the PTA once more called attention to the importance of physical education when delegates to its convention adopted the following resolution: "We urge a sound physical education program for every child from infancy to adulthood. We deplore any tendency in competitive athletics to train the few and neglect the many, especially the emphasis on training girls and young women for Olympic championships and similar events."

In subsequent years, the PTA continued to work for the provision of physical education for <u>all</u> children and in <u>every</u> school. The effort did not go unrewarded, for, by the late 1930s, 44 states had passed laws requiring instruction in physical education.

Through the years, the PTA has urged its members to evaluate the physical education and athletic programs in their schools. A PTA publication, first published in 1958 and called Looking In on Your School, contains a section on physical education in which PTA members are urged to find answers to a number of important questions.

I quote some of these questions here to give you an idea of what the PTA considers important in physical education and also to indicate the multi-faceted focus of our efforts on its behalf.

"Are there physical education courses for all boys and girls? Is physical fitness a prime objective? Are a child's activities selected on the basis of his physical examination and medical record? What kind of program is there for the handicapped? What efforts are made to teach individual sports and activities that can be enjoyed throughout life--for example, bowling, golf, tennis, fishing, swimming, skiing, skating, dancing and the like?

"What facilities and equipment are provided for indoor and outdoor activities? How adequate are sanitation and safety measures? What training do teachers have for the physical education program?

"What is school policy on intramural and interschool sports? How do budget, personnel, facilities, and

equipment for intramural and interschool athletics compare?"

In conjunction with its efforts on behalf of physical education, the PTA, in recent years, has become deeply concerned about piecemeal efforts in the area of health education. Consequently, the PTA is now actively promoting a program of comprehensive school health education.

The PTA believes this program should cover not only physical health, including physical education, but also mental and emotional health; nutrition; anatomy and physiology; education for parenthood and family living; alcohol and drug abuse; environmental health; accident prevention and safety--as well as the importance of being able to act responsibly and decisively.

It is through this program that the PTA hopes children and youth will begin to learn about the many facets of good health--and why it is important for them always to respect and care for themselves. This approach is needed now more than ever because modern patterns of living have intensified such problems as heart disease, obesity, mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction, and venereal disease.

As a result, the PTA is convinced that only through a comprehensive health-education program will children

and youth obtain the skills and knowledge they need to maintain good health throughout the rest of their lives.

For this reason, then, the PTA urges its local units to work for a comprehensive school health-education program that offers a well-planned, sequential curriculum from kindergarten through grade 12; makes use of current curricular materials; is scheduled at a specified time; is taught by teachers genuinely interested--and properly trained--in health education; and, finally, is adequately financed.

It was with this goal in mind that the National PTA helped draft the Comprehensive School Health Education bill that was introduced in the 94th Congress. This, as you know, is the bill that would establish a three-year program to encourage the development of sound health habits in children through a comprehensive school health-education program. It would also authorize grants for teacher-training; for pilot and demonstration projects; and for comprehensive health-education programs.

Helping to secure passage of this bill is one of four priorities in the National PTA's current Legislative Program.

As its record indicates, the PTA obviously views physical education as an essential ingredient in the

education of the total child. At the same time, however, the PTA emphasizes that physical education must be looked at in terms of all of the various aspects of good health education. No one factor should be stressed at the expense of another.

Good health to us, then--to ourselves and to our children. And continued success to you in the fine and important work conducted by your organization.